

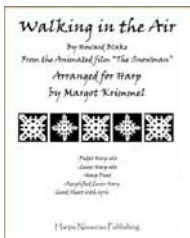
This article by Margot Krimmel was first published in the September 2015 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

You can find Margot's PDFs at www.harpcenter.com/Krimmel



I like to say, I started my career at age three, singing whatever came into my head. As a youngster, I was a mediocre flute and piano player, as a teen, a pretty good guitar player. But really, it all started when I bought a used harp (a 30-string made by Jay Witcher) from someone who got it from Sylvia Woods. With that harp and a book called *Teach Yourself to Play Folk Harp*, my career was launched.

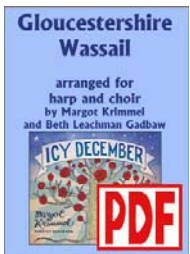
Lessons with Sylvia Woods, Deborah Henson-Conant, and orchestral harpist Helen Hope all helped me immensely with harp technique and musicianship. A six night a week gig in Vail, CO gave me hours of practice (and a free ski pass). The Vail engagement honed my arranging skills. If someone requested a song I didn't know, I would figure it out.



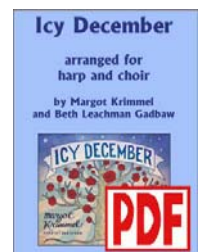
In the early 1990's, I called Faber and Faber in London asking for permission to arrange *Walking in the Air* from the animated *Snowman* movie. The English accent "shut-down" ('under no circumstances will Mr. Blake allow his music to be arranged') stung a bit. A few years ago, I mentioned the piece to my publishers, Dave and Deb Kolacny. They worked their magic, got permission (pending approval by the composer) and I got to work. I'm certain that the arrangements -- three different solos, lead sheet and duet -- are all the better for the wait. (You can see a YouTube video of this song in a clip from the movie on the *Walking in the Air*

product page.)

I have two approaches to arranging. With pop music, such as *Falling Slowly* from the movie *Once*, the challenge is replicating the original spunk, hooks and band sound as closely as possible. Playing the parts of all the instruments can make for a complicated harp part. Often finding an easy way to distill the complexity is about making it feel good to play. I experiment until the groove feels as good to play as it sounds.



When I arrange well-known pieces, like the *Gloucestershire Wassail* and *Icy December*, I'll improvise until I find something new. In *Wassail*, I added fun key changes. For *Icy December*, I slowed the tempo down and a gorgeous harp part emerged. I've arranged these pieces for choir and lever or pedal harp. If you sing in a choir, summer is the time to present these to the music director. You can watch a video performance of *Icy December* on the product page.



Since 2004, I've been arranging and composing harp ensemble pieces for the Colorado Celtic Harp Society to play with Denver's Cherry Creek Chorale. When my music partner, Beth Gadbow and I recorded our second CD, *Icy December* in 2011, we had no idea we'd be arranging the tracks for the Chorale, harp and bodhran. That collaboration has led to others, including a commission by the Seattle choir, Cora Voce. In May 2016, we'll premier new choir/harp arrangements with Cora Voce.



Living in Boulder, Colorado provides a variety of creative opportunities. Last summer, Beth and I spent a week at Caribou Ranch Open Space as Artists-In Residence and wrote new music. Here's a video of our first song from the program: <https://youtu.be/2utKqoSZOks>

This month I'm collaborating with an award winning poet, playing Irish music for St Pat's with my four-piece band, and coaching a high school harp quartet. Next month, I'll record my own solo work, play for a two hour Celtic Mass, rehearse my harp trio with a nationally known break dancer, and present my youth students in a concert performance at the Boulder Main Library. I am very lucky.



My students inspire me with their hard work and their smiles. Courses in the Suzuki Method and Orff Schulework have given me a good balance of both the technical and creative aspects of harp. As dancer Martha Graham says, 'Good technique makes the impossible look easy'. I'm a stickler for good technique. I have a deep bag of tricks, but more importantly, a willingness to look at each student individually. I encourage my students to find the music for themselves, so they own what they are playing. Expression, improvisation and composition are encouraged in my studio.

Playing for yoga and labyrinth walks keep my tone rich and my head clear. Irish music sessions keep my fingers moving fast and my feet tapping. You can check out my upcoming calendar and find more information on my whitebirdsmusic.com website. Here's a video of my band playing for St. Patrick's Day: <https://youtu.be/rqXaf8Z9ii0>



For me, music is not about the notes, nor what I hear on the surface, but about the deeper soul expression. My guiding star is to stay true to myself. I can't define exactly what that is, but I know when I'm playing honestly and when I'm not.

-- Margot Krimmel